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PROCESS OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY, WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF THE ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Working paper submitted by Ireland

I. INTRODUCTION

Ireland attaches the highest priority to nuclear disarmament. We consider that recent developments in the disarmament field represent significant steps towards the achievement of this goal. The present state of international relations provides an unprecedented opportunity for building on these achievements and making progress towards the earliest possible attainment of the ultimate objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

We consider that the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission in the process of nuclear disarmament should take full account of these recent developments. Over the next two years, it should focus on the future and seek to identify practicable approaches, in the multilateral and bilateral spheres, which can make a major contribution to the achievement of nuclear disarmament. This paper is intended to suggest what these practicable approaches might be and what role the United Nations might play in promoting them.

II. STRENGTHENING THE PROCESS OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Recent developments suggest that focusing on a number of intermediate objectives would make a major contribution towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. We suggest that the intermediate objectives in question should be selected so as to build on current achievements and to serve in their turn as platforms for more ambitious measures. We propose a number of areas where progress could be made relatively quickly without, in our view, endangering the security of any country.

(i) The elimination of sub-strategic systems

We consider that, with the substantial reductions in these weapons as a result of unilateral initiatives, the time is now ripe to seek the complete elimination of all sub-strategic systems. As an intermediate objective, this would have certain advantages. It would reduce the risk of conventional war escalating into a nuclear conflict. It would lessen the risks of accidental or deliberate interference. Confining nuclear weapons to strategic systems would make them weapons of truly last resort and so provide greater assurance that they would never be used.

(ii) Prohibition of the testing and development of new nuclear weapons

Ireland has long been a supporter of a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing. We continue to believe that agreement on such a ban is essential to prevent the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons. There is now a growing recognition of the need for restraint in the development of new and more powerful nuclear weapons. There is also an increasing realization that a cessation of nuclear weapons testing would contribute to non-proliferation as well as environmental objectives. In the recent past, two of the nuclear Powers have announced unilateral suspensions of their testing programmes.

The Disarmament Commission should consider how to promote the prohibition of the testing and development of new nuclear weapons, either by adoption of a multilateral instrument or by other appropriate methods.

(iii) Strengthening of the non-proliferation regime

Proliferation of nuclear weapons continues to be a major and growing problem which requires our continuous attention. There is a clear need for strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, in particular through the development of the IAEA safeguards system. Other measures for strengthening the non-proliferation regime are also required. In this connection, recent proposals of measures aimed at introducing penalties for violations of the NPT Treaty merit consideration.

(iv) The disposal of nuclear weapons

The international community has a duty to play its part in ensuring that the destruction of nuclear weapons takes place in a safe and responsible manner, which fully respects the requirements of nuclear safety and environmental protection. Already, a number of important efforts have been made to assist in the dismantling and disposal of nuclear weapons. Consideration should be given to what further role the international community, and in particular the IAEA, can play in this regard.

(v) Confidence-building measures

Confidence-building measures have proved their effectiveness as a basis for more substantive measures in the field of conventional disarmament, notably in the CSCE framework. We consider that confidence-building measures would also serve a useful purpose in the nuclear arms field. Such measures should aim at reassuring non-nuclear weapon States that nuclear weapons are intended for purely defensive purposes and that nuclear arsenals are safe and under effective control. They should also help non-proliferation by persuading would-be nuclear weapons States that their security interests could be adequately ensured by other means.

III. ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Ireland considers that the question of nuclear disarmament is central to the security concerns of all States, whether or not they possess nuclear weapons. We consider that the United Nations, as the universal body with prime responsibility for the prevention of conflict, has an essential role to play in bringing about the elimination of nuclear weapons. The meeting of the Security Council at the level of Heads of State or Government on 31 January 1992 underlined the need for all Member States "to fulfil their obligations in relation to arms control and disarmament; to prevent the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction (and) to avoid excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers of arms".

Although we recognize that many major steps towards eliminating nuclear weapons must, of necessity, be undertaken on the basis of unilateral or bilateral actions, we believe that much useful work can and should be undertaken at a multilateral level. This Commission should address, as a matter of urgency, how this multilateral dimension should be structured, and how Member States can effectively discharge their obligations in this regard.

We consider that the role of the United Nations should be to encourage and facilitate:

(i) The development of general guidelines and basic principles of arms control and disarmament;

(ii) Consideration of ways and means of achieving the international community's objectives in nuclear disarmament;

(iii) The negotiation, where appropriate, of international instruments in the field of nuclear disarmament.